

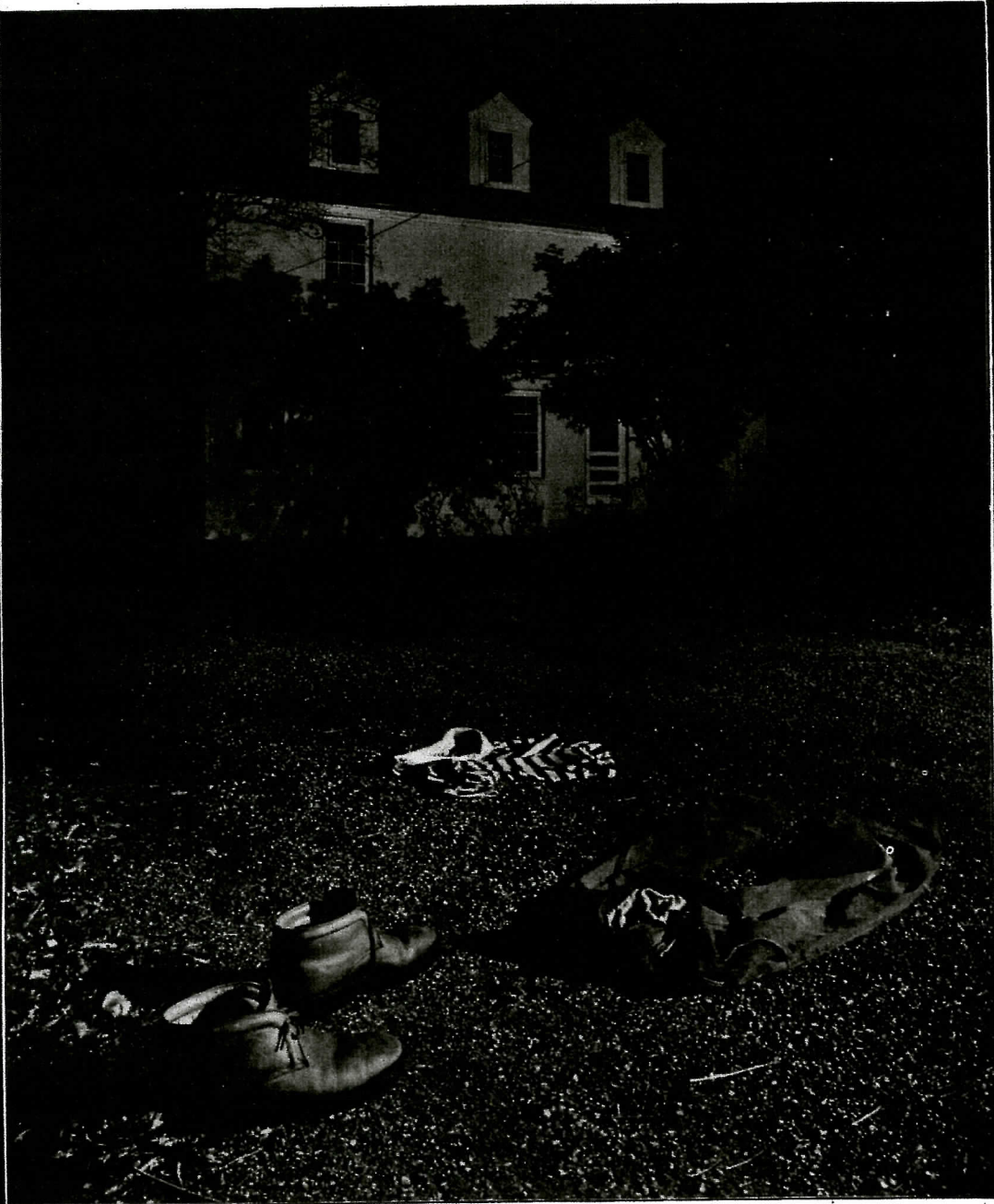
CORPUS CHRISTI

magazine

Are Our Schools Creating Kids Who Can't Create?



An Uncovered Tale



by David C. Morrow

If we could line up Corpus Christi's historical figures, one would stand out in stark contrast to all others. Despite his extensive public exposure, despite the impact and comparative recency of his accomplishments, this person remains such a mystery that only the barest facts are visible.

John Freeman

A NEW FAD? More Nude Prowler Complaints

Times — October 12, 1961

His active career and influence flourished between 1959 and 1962. A newspaper article, dated November 23, 1960, records that "the nude burglar who has terrorized the Del Mar Addition for more than a year" caused a turmoil the previous night that brought 20 police cars and crowds of citizens to Atlantic Street and ended after two hours and six gunshots with the culprit escaping north on Southern Street. An October 1961 article gives the Nude Burglar's career to date as "two and a half years."

While some of his followers were mere prowlers, our subject was a burglar. The *Caller-Times* reported that "He slips quietly into homes and steals purses while occupants watch television. He does this without his clothes on." On January 13, 1961, for instance, \$20 was taken from the purse of Eleanor Baker, under whose Third Street house detectives found four purses, one believed to have been taken by the Nude Burglar.

By 1962 he was credited with having stolen "money from women's purses in more than 100 homes," including that of City Councilman R.A. Humble.

Mrs. W.J. McEvoy and her daughter Frances can laugh about the thief now, even though they were \$36 poorer after he paid them a visit in the summer of 1960. Frances

remembers unlocking the screen door one night because she was expecting her brother. A few minutes later, after she had gone into the bedroom, she heard her father yelling that a nude man was in the house. Before the culprit had vanished ("I can't imagine where he went in such a hurry," says Mrs. McEvoy) he had taken money from Frances' purse and stolen her mother's handbag.

Several months later, Mrs. McEvoy's purse was recovered, along with several others, underneath a Naples Street house. The only thing missing from her purse was the greenbacks. "All he ever took was paper money," she explains. The pair wonders what he would have done with anything else, since he didn't have any place to carry stolen goods. Incidentally, after the robbery, "We used to carry our purses with us wherever we would go" in the house, remembers Frances.

The filching flasher's modus operandi remained consistent. He seemed to have travelled afoot — though one suspect was seen escaping in a brown car — and clothed, undressing — save sometimes for his shoes and occasionally shorts and a scarf — outdoors at work sites. In February 1961 a Clifford Street woman "looked out her window and saw a man undressing by the clothes line." A practical place, for sure.

According to Sgt. Robert C. Garza (then a plainclothes detective) the Nude Burglar tried to prey on homes in which the women were alone. He obviously peeked through windows, says Garza, because "he knew exactly where the purse was at." After spotting the handbags lying around, he'd strip, then break into the house to claim the goods. Yet, Garza recalls, the Nude Burglar did not bother the women: he didn't even speak to them. "He'd just stand there and exhibit himself and then run."

(Sometimes, he'd sneak in during evening bridge parties; undoubtedly the pickings were much more exciting then.)

As mentioned earlier, the Nude Burglar's territory was the Del Mar Addition. "We established for sure he'd lived there," reports Garza. (If so, he certainly couldn't have been on especially intimate terms with his neighbors.) The only policeman who ever spotted the culprit in action, Garza gave the bandit chase for a couple of blocks. The policeman jumped fences, while the thief went through gates: "he knew his way around."

That he fled the melee of November 22, 1960 north across the 600 block of Southern suggests we look in that direction. Yet he could either have been leading the law

LEAVES S Nude Bu Own Cinc

away from his place or just seeking any sanctuary. The location of his home remains shrouded in darkness.

Descriptions agree that the Nude Burglar was about six feet tall, weighed about 200 pounds and was in his fifties. He is said to have had a square face and short, black hair, the latter probably meaning in the context of the times a burr or crewcut. Beyond this, descriptions vary and are confused with those of other clothesless crooks. Garza says women reported the thief had "grease all over his body...that was why he was hard to identify." Says Dick Runyan, police chief of the time, "One odd thing about it, nobody ever saw his face."

His shoes were taken by Detective Garza after that fateful chase and



found to be "worn rubber-soled oxfords," size 11-D, that contained a comb, indicative of good grooming.

Although the City Council had never "formally taken notice of the nude burglar situation," Councilman Humble told Police Chief Runyan to double his efforts to catch the villain. According to a newspaper account, Humble informed the chief that neighborhood women were "nervous...and the nude burglar...the prime topic of conversation." Garza remembers the chief "made it a point a bunch of us [was] out there every night until the guy was caught."

One longtime resident of the Del Mar Addition remembers going to bed one evening, then hearing motorcycles roar down the street. She and her husband arose again only to hear on TV that the Nude Burglar

had discovered a jaybird removing her window screen and doused him with a pan of water. A few weeks later a Third Street woman awakened to frighten a naked man from her bedroom — hardly the expected scenario unless the couple is married. A few months earlier, a man who may have been nude unsuccessfully tried to enter the front doors of Del Mar Addition houses before vanishing into the drizzly 50° night.

Arrests didn't seem to stop the prowlers, and irate citizens couldn't keep their shirts on. When an elderly Moravian Street woman called for extra police patrols, the dispatcher warned officers that the residents were "carrying shotguns and pistols." By February 1962, shots were being fired in the Central Park area, where the previous October police and residents — one carrying a shotgun — had chased a beady-eyed rascal wearing a tattoo on his right shoulder who continued to haunt, or flaunt, the area.

The original unclad klepto was never arrested. One of the earliest suspects was found, after considerable searching, to have been in jail during most escapades. A naked man caught running about the Del Mar Addition "was released after police confirmed his story of how he came to be without clothing." His story, which might shed light on the prowlers, was not reported in the newspaper. A man arrested for peeping sans clothes through the front door of a South Staples Street cafe denied being the Nude Burglar and insisted that this was "the 'first time I ever did anything like this.'"

Clearly the Nude Burglar, who was being seen less often, inspired these individuals, but who were they? Did a Nude Prowling Conspiracy exist, or can each separate case be adequately explained by the Lone Pervert Theory?

The Nude Burglar, at whom dogs seldom barked, was an excellent runner. He ran "like a jackrabbit," one patrolman said. Mrs. John C. Green met someone she suspected

BARE HUNT Nude Eludes Neighbors, Officers

Caller — November 23, 1960

to be the Nude Burglar, even though he was dressed in tight-fitting shorts. She chased him along Cole Street the night before St. Patrick's Day, 1961, and said afterwards, "he disappeared in a flash." Had he been an athlete, possibly a track star?

Sgt. Garza admits he can "hold my own" when it comes to running, but the Nude Burglar outdistanced him easily. That fateful night the two raced, November 22, 1960, Garza had parked his car near Louisiana Parkway and Ocean Drive. After seeing something move in the bushes, he turned on his flashlight. The policeman saw the thief bending over, apparently trying to put on his pants.

Garza ordered the culprit not to run. But the nude man ran anyway; Garza followed suit. The law officer fired three shots, one as a warning. During the chase, the thief dropped a purse and a wallet he had evidently taken; still, his pursuer could not catch up.

"If he'd a-joined the Olympics that year," believes Garza, "he'd a-won. That son of a gun could run."

After September 6, 1962, nude prowling declined. That night on Clifford Street the Carl V. Larsons saw a fully clothed man sneaking around the home of neighbor Juan Galvan Jr. As the man circled the house, Mrs. Larson decided to phone the Galvans; and when her

ES BEHIND Nude Burglar Does Prowling Act

Times — November 23, 1960

had been spotted in their block. A few weeks later, her husband informed her that the morning after this had occurred, he'd seen footprints around their garage, and a pair of gloves had been left in the driveway. He had waited until then to let her know of his findings, since he didn't wish to alarm his wife.

By the fall Corpus Christi harbored a host of nudes who appeared regularly in various places, including Moravian, Brownlee, Nicholson, Fifteenth and Nell streets. "Prowling about in the nude," noted the newspaper on October 12, 1961, "is almost becoming a fad here."

That day, for example, a woman



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husband saw the prowler reappear, apparently nude and carrying something, he got a gun and gave chase. Too late. Beyond a distant glimpse of the man dressing, Larson saw him no more.

This was evidently the final fling for the fleet-footed felon, whom the *Caller-Times* reported to have "stopped operating" the previous winter "after police put on an extensive campaign to catch him." The authorities were successful after all. Deprived of their inspiration, others ceased prowling, and incidents became fewer and further between, the last taking place in December 1965. A distinctive episode of Corpus Christi's history had ended.

Who was the Nude Burglar? At the time of Corpus Christi's bareskin burglar epidemic, plenty of rumors as to his identity floated around. Says former chief Runyan, some wives suspected their husbands. One woman recalls hearing that he was a retired neighborhood doctor; another says she heard he was "a very prominent businessman." According to her, word had it that "the police knew who it was, but didn't want to catch him." Sgt. Garza reports, "We didn't really have any concrete evidence," and Runyan says the suspect is dead.

But what of the Nude Burglar as a person? What was he as a son, a husband, a father, an uncle? Soldier, voter, employee? Did he hail from the upper income brackets — a lawyer, a doctor, a plumber? Or was he from among the unfortunate and the evil — a psychiatric patient, an algebra teacher, even a used car salesman?

Perhaps he was a free spirit tortured by society's rules, perhaps a solid citizen warped by hideous desires to run about in the raw, perhaps someone with an idea so new it could only be expressed by stealing in one's birthday suit. Only further research can flesh out our skimpy outline unless, somewhere, a naked man in his seventies stands ready to bare his soul. ☐

David C. Morrow is a native of Corpus Christi now living in Arlington. This story's inspiration comes from "either a desire for warmer weather or to make a contribution to the history of my hometown."